Osteoporosis – Frequently Asked Questions

What is osteoporosis?
Osteoporosis is a thinning of the bones. Thinner bones are more fragile and can break easily.

How common is osteoporosis?
It is most common in older women. In the U.S., it affects nearly 10 million people. More than 2 million men have osteoporosis. And 18 million more people have "low bone density." This increases their risk of breaking a bone.

How do I know if I have osteoporosis?
Often, you may not know until you break a bone. The first sign that you have osteoporosis may be that you become shorter.

How is osteoporosis diagnosed?
Your health care provider will ask questions like:
- Does anyone in your family have osteoporosis?
- What medications are you taking?
- Do you smoke?
- Do you drink alcohol?
- Have you ever had a broken bone?

Your provider will also check for any changes in your posture or your height.

Women will be asked if they have gone through menopause.

A bone density test called a DEXA scan tells about bone health. It can tell if someone has osteoporosis.

Women 65 and older should be screened for osteoporosis. Screening for women at a higher risk for osteoporosis should start at age 60.
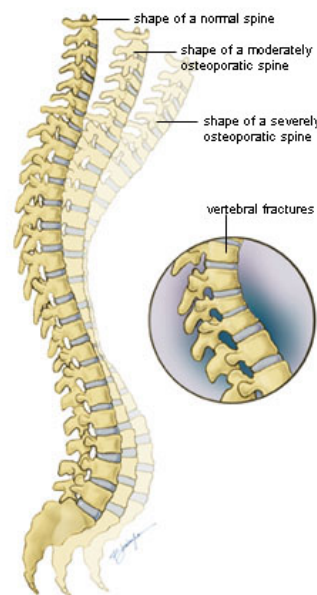
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Can osteoporosis be prevented?

The best prevention for osteoporosis is to build strong bones. Everyone, old or young, should:

- Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
- Get enough calcium from the foods they eat or take calcium supplements.
- Choose Low-fat milk, yogurt and cheeses; dark green leafy vegetables; sardines, salmon with bones; tofu; almonds. Look for calcium fortified juices and cereals.
- Get enough Vitamin D from sunlight or from fortified foods like milk.
- Do weight-bearing activities like walking and dancing. These can help to keep bones healthy.
- Stop smoking.
- Limit the amount of alcohol they drink.

Are there treatments for osteoporosis?

The main goal of treatment is to prevent a broken bone.

Eating a balanced and healthy diet that includes enough calcium and vitamin D will help.

Doing weight-bearing activities will also help.

Your provider may prescribe medications to slow bone loss and increase bone strength.

How can I prevent a fall?

Making simple changes in your home can help prevent a fall.

- Keep rooms well lighted and use a night light.
- Wear your glasses.
- Don't let things pile up on the floor.
- Don't use throw rugs.
- Wear shoes with rubber soles and low heels.
- Use a cane or walker if you are unsteady when you walk.
- Use a rubber mat in the bath tub.

Talk with your Health Care Team if you have specific questions or concerns.